

# network

HUMANITIES

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Council Executive Director Jim Quay to retire after 25 years.

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Exhibit on indigenous Mexican farmworkers aims to change hearts and minds.



## EIGHT YOUTH DIGITAL FILMMAKERS PROJECTS UNDER WAY ACROSS THE STATE

*Lodi High students are making short documentary films about cultural and economic divides in their community as part of Youth Digital Filmmakers. From right: Zyania Lizarraga, Saul Diaz, John Chumley, Jr. and Amber Peer. Photo/Whiney Martinez: Lodi News-Centinel.*

## TEENS TO CREATE FILMS ABOUT BEING HOMELESS, LGBT HISTORY, FINDING IDENTITY AND MORE

What does it mean to be young and homeless in California? How do you develop your own identity when your history is rooted in a war-torn past you never knew? Where do you find purpose in life when you live in the inner city thick with gangs, drugs and violence?

These are some of the issues that teens in eight projects around the state will explore and make films about over the next year as part of Youth Digital Filmmakers, the first project of California Stories: How I See It, the Council's statewide campaign to engage young people in using video, photography and other media to create stories about what matters in their lives.

"The idea behind Youth Digital Filmmakers is to provide a way through filmmaking for young people to have a voice in what happens in their communities and to give them skills that will serve them well in the future," said Council Executive Director Jim Quay.

More than 60 teens from a variety of cultural backgrounds are involved in the program. The projects, all of

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## TEENS AND PROJECT DIRECTORS GATHER IN SAN FRANCISCO TO LAUNCH TEEN FILMMAKING PROGRAM



*The young filmmakers and adult leaders of the Los Angeles project enjoy a cable car ride during their two-day stay in San Francisco. From left: Saidel George, Quierra Smith, Jan Pfeiffer (rear), Tamika Jones, Terrell Hughey and Jasmine Tatum (front).*

Teens learn about filmmaking, meet filmmakers, make friends. It was a two-day whirlwind of workshops, performances and sightseeing for the fledgling filmmakers and project directors around the state who gathered in San Francisco in October to mark the start of Youth Digital Filmmakers, the Council's program to engage teens in making films about issues in their communities. The first program of the Council's new How I See It campaign, Youth Digital Filmmakers encompasses projects in Concord, Fresno Lodi, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco and Siskiyou County. All eight projects are now under way.

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## FRESNO TEENS TO MAKE DOCUMENTARY FILM ABOUT AREA'S AGRICULTURAL HISTORY



*The Fresno team in a "freeze-frame" exercise during the YDF kickoff event. Front: MaryJane Skellerup and Brandon Wright. Rear (from left): Nora Walker, Maricela Hernandez and Jennifer Gaxiola. Photo/ Carlos Torres.*

**FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS**, Fresno, Calif., the economic center of the country's richest agricultural region and one of the fastest-growing cities in the nation, has attracted wave after wave of newcomers to farm the land and find a better future. Now, as Fresno continues to swallow up rural communities to accommodate its growing population, 10 teenagers plan to make a documentary film about the many ethnic groups that helped make Fresno the agricultural powerhouse it is today.

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The California Council for the Humanities is a state-based affiliate of the National Endowment for the humanities. Humanities Network is published three times a year and mailed to anyone who requests it from the San Francisco office.

# LONG-TIME CCH DIRECTOR JIM QUAY TO RETIRE NEXT MARCH

The California Council for the Humanities regretfully announces that Executive Director Jim Quay will retire next March after serving as executive director since 1983. Under Quay's leadership, the Council has become California's premier funder of both documentary films and public programs that use the humanities to strengthen community.

"Because people from all over the world have chosen to come here, the culture we are making in California is watched with special attention," Quay said. "During my years at CCH, I've been inspired by the stories of the men and women who've made their home here — the challenges they face and their attempts to create a future together. I leave with deep admiration and gratitude for the hundreds of project directors and the many members of the CCH board and staff with whom it has been my privilege to work. Their

passion and energy are helping to create a culture of hope in a world that desperately needs it."

"For almost 25 years, Jim's leadership of the Council has been brilliant and visionary," said Douglas Greenberg, chairman of the Council's Board of Directors and president and chief executive officer of the USC Shoah Foundation for Visual History and Education. "He has earned a well-deserved reputation in California and throughout the national public humanities community for thoughtful program design, deeply considered ideas and principled advocacy. He will leave a record of remarkable achievement and be greatly missed."

The Council is undertaking a nationwide search for Quay's successor.

## A FINAL WORD — TO MY HEROES

By James Quay, Executive Director

LAST MARCH, I announced my decision to retire, a year in advance, to give the Council plenty of time to find my successor. Now the time has come to write my final column, and I feel the impossibility of saying a proper goodbye. How do I communicate all that the Council has meant to me these past 24 years? How do I thank all the wonderful people I have worked with and for, express my gratitude for the privilege of living in California and the challenge of serving its people? I have so loved having the whole of California as a theater of activity and as a source of hope. As usual when I say goodbye, I find my heart full and my mouth dry.

A couple of years ago, the Council hosted a national humanities conference in San Francisco. Hundreds of board and staff members from humanities councils all over the country came here to discuss their individual and collective status. I asked an old friend, Malcolm Margolin, to act as an anthropologist for the conference, first observing it and then passing along his observations to the participants. "This strikes me as a roomful of people who had a transcendent experience in some humanities classroom somewhere," he told the assembled humanists, "and who as a result want to make it possible for others to have such an experience." A shock of recognition and affirmation went through the hotel ballroom.

I was fortunate enough to have had many such moments in both humanities classrooms and at public humanities programs. I hope that sharing the story of one such moment will communicate more powerfully how wonderful it has been to serve as CCH's executive director these past 24 years than any set of statistics or list of projects, however long and impressive, could do.

In 1992, the Council mounted a Chautauqua tour to commemorate the Columbus Quincentenary, "Columbus and After: Rethinking the Legacy." A troupe of scholars visited four California towns — Santa Barbara, Merced, Santa Clara and Ukiah — and gave presentations of four historical characters: Columbus, Junipero Serra, Antonio Garra and Jessie Benton Fremont, characters with quite different perspectives on the effects of Columbus' "discovery" of America.

The campus culture wars were then in full cry, and for many, the subject of Columbus was a lightning rod. Once celebrated as an intrepid explorer, Columbus had come to be seen by many as the poster boy for European racism and imperial brutality toward native peoples in the Americas. The point of the Chautauqua tour was to give the public an occasion to hear the voice of Columbus as he would have presented himself, unapologetically and as true to the historical record as possible, to ask questions of Columbus and be answered by Columbus, and then to ask questions of the scholar portraying him.

As in all the towns, a local committee in Ukiah had been working for many months to plan the week of presentations and workshops involved in the Columbus Chautauqua. They had labored mightily to include representatives from Ukiah's various communities, and, most especially, its Native Americans. A festive big-top tent had been raised for the performances, but there was tension in the air before Columbus' presentation. Several Native Americans had indicated they would be staging a protest. Our hearts sank. Our aim had been to create a presentation that would keep everyone in the tent, critics and defenders alike.



The protestors were not disruptive. Four stood silently facing the audience with pictures made from 16th-century woodcuts showing Spaniards killing Indians. A veiled woman stood at stage left with a lit candle. The performance began with professor Greg Monahan portraying Columbus, giving an unapologetic account of his actions, his search for gold, his treatment of native peoples, and his complaints of insufficient appreciation for the deeds. Whenever Columbus related a particularly brutal incident, the veiled woman would simply moan, to powerful effect.

Then, during the question-and-answer session, she began to ask questions and make comments more often, and the audience began to object that she was obstructing their interrogation of Columbus. By the time Monahan broke character and began talking with the audience about Columbus, she had stopped interrupting.

After the performance, a man came up to me and said bitterly, "Well I guess YOU'RE happy." I asked what he meant. "All this," he said, gesturing toward the protestors. I explained that we had not known about the protest until minutes before the performance and certainly had not staged it. At first the man was disbelieving, but as I separated the planned activities from the protest, his attitude turned complimentary as he realized how the planners had trusted, not tricked, the audience. Columbus had spoken with the voice of a 16th-century explorer, not a 20th-century liberal. The audience had asked its questions, hard questions, and had heard hard answers in return. But in the end, everyone had stayed under the tent, everyone had heard difficult and contentious issues addressed.

What I learned that night confirmed the best about public humanities events and the people who attend them: There is a hunger for high-quality humanities programs; audiences are capable of independent judgment and suspicious of, even hostile to, attempts to impose a point of view on them; presentations of "official" history can naturally attract local stories that enrich and enliven that history; people are capable of great empathy, able to feel the pain of others and to ask why and how such pain is inflicted. Night after night, the Chautauquans told me, the conversation went on, and by the end of the tour, the performers felt that the ability of people to engage in honest dialogue and to take steps toward reconciliation across painful historical divides had been affirmed. These are the abilities that make a democracy possible.

In 1983, near the end of one of the interviews leading to my hire as CCH's executive director, Walter Capps, a professor of religious studies and the Council's chairman, turned to me and asked, "Do you have any heroes?" The question took me by surprise; it was so outside the usual range of interview questions. I gave my answer (I.F. Stone and Martin Buber), but I was so taken with the question that I have asked it in every interview I've been part of ever since.

Twenty-four years later, I have a new answer now. My heroes are the hundreds of project directors across California who mount the public programs and who produce the documentaries that give CCH's program substance and significance. My heroes are the humanities scholars who offer their time and expertise to those projects despite the lack of official reward. My heroes are the people who come to the programs and give the gift of their serious attention. Yours are labors of love that enrich our public space and enliven our common culture. I will be forever grateful and proud to have been, for a time, a part of such a noble enterprise with such splendid companions. My heartfelt thanks to you, heroes all.

James Quay

# \$208,000 AWARDED TO 22 STORY PROJECTS AROUND THE STATE

## WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE FOR THE CHINESE WORKERS WHO HELPED BUILD THE TRANSCONTINENTAL RAILROAD? HOW DID THE CHICANO MOVEMENT AFFECT THE DEVELOPMENT OF MUSIC GROUPS IN THE IMPERIAL VALLEY? WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CAODAIST RELIGION IN VIETNAMESE CULTURE?

These are just a few of the topics of the 22 California Story Fund projects funded by the Council in September. The projects, now under way, use a range of formats in gathering and telling stories, including video and radio, oral history interviews, exhibits, stage performances and art tours.

The projects will take place over the next several months and culminate with free events for the public. Each of the projects received up to \$10,000 in funding. Check the Council's website for more information about the projects and for events in your area.

The following are the most recently funded projects:

### NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

**California Croatian Stories Project** Sponsored by the Slavonic Cultural Center, San Francisco; John Daley, project director. Documenting the history of Croatians in the San Francisco Bay Area through interviews, photographs and video.

**Chinese Whispers: Sierra Stories** Sponsored by the Arts Council of Placer County, Auburn; Rene Yung, project director. Stories and memories of the Chinese workers who helped build the Transcontinental Railroad.

**Field Disclosure: An Oral History** Sponsored by the National Steinbeck Center, Salinas; Lori Wood and Deborah Silguero-Stahl, project directors. National Steinbeck Center to create a documentary

on the history of agriculture in the Salinas Valley from 1960 to 2000.

**Hi Good and the Last Yahis** Sponsored by the Butte County Historical Society, Oroville; Lee Lynch, project director. Teens to dramatize little-known incident in Yahi Indian history.

**Leap of Faith** Sponsored by Many Threads, San Francisco; Lina Hoshina, project director. A short documentary film about how Sebastopol teens took action against a hate crime in the wake of World War II.

**Up From the Understory** Sponsored by the Center for the Study of Regional Change, UC Davis; Jonathan London, project director. Local youth to document community efforts to revitalize communities in eastern Calaveras County.

**Wartime, Our Times** Sponsored by KALW-FM, San Francisco; Matthew Martin, project director. Teens and elders to tell stories of war in radio broadcast.

### SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

**Chinatown Remembered: An Oral History Project** Sponsored by the Chinese Historical Society of Southern California, Los Angeles; William Gow, project director. College students to document life in L.A.'s Chinatown during the 1930s and 1940s.

**Eye for Eye: The Punishment and Retribution Project** Sponsored by the Cornerstone Theater Company, Los Angeles; Laurie Woolery, project director. Gathering and presenting in monologues the stories of individuals affected by the prison system.

**Family Stories: Sharing a Community's Legacy** Sponsored by Pasadena Museum

of History; Ardis Willwerth, project director. Museum to research and create an exhibit based on the stories of six families from several ethnic groups.

**Going for the Gold** Sponsored by the Department of Contracts and Grants, University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Michael Several, project director. Documenting the creation of public art on the Gold Line rail line in Los Angeles and subsequent art tours for the public.

**Las Grandes de East L.A. and Boyle Heights: Women as Community Builders** Sponsored by California State University, Los Angeles, University Auxiliary Services; Dionne Espinoza, project director. East Los Angeles high school students to document the lives of 10 notable women in the community.

**A Look at Work in Bixby Knolls** Sponsored by the Historical Society of Long Beach; Julie Bartolotto, project director. Boys and Girls Club members to interview local Bixby Knolls residents about their work and then dramatize their stories.

**Mi Musica, My Road to Life** Sponsored by the Institute for Socio-Economic Justice, Brawley; Eric Reyes, project director. Gathering and exhibiting the story of the political and musical evolution of Imperial Valley music groups.

**Movement and Migration: Our Family Journeys** Sponsored by the Zimmer Children's Museum, Los Angeles; Shifra Teitelbaum, project director. L.A. youth to gather and record their families' stories of movement and migration for radio broadcast.

**Native American Voices From the Mojave Desert** Sponsored by Main Street Murals, Barstow; David Brockhurst, project director. Kids to learn about Native American history and culture of Mojave region, create murals illustrating Native American life.

**Perspectives on the American Dream: Views From Immigrant and Refugee Teens**

in the San Diego-Tijuana Border Region Sponsored by Media Arts Center San Diego; Ethan van Thillo, project director. Immigrant and refugee teens to create short video documentary on their view of the American Dream.

**Picturing Californian Ethnoburbs: Documentary Photography by San Gabriel Valley Teens** Sponsored by the Friends of the Chinese American Museum, Los Angeles; Pauline Wong, project director. High school students to use photography to document their diverse communities.

**Telling the Streets: True Urban Legends** Sponsored by the San Diego Public Library; Lynn Whitehouse, project director. San Diego's homeless youth to tell their urban legends.

**This Is the L.A. River** Sponsored by the Echo Park Film Center, Los Angeles; Paolo Davanzo, project director. Youths to make documentary film about the L.A. River.

**Vietnamese Indigenous Religion Finds a New Home in California** Sponsored by the University of Southern California, Center for Religion and Civic Culture, Los Angeles; Janet Hoskins, project director. A documentary film about a little-known religion from Vietnam.

**When Will Punishment End? Stories by formerly incarcerated women** Sponsored by the University Corporation Northridge; Marta Lopez-Garza, project director. Formerly incarcerated women reveal their struggles re-entering society in video documentary.

The guidelines for the Feb. 4, 2008, round of funding for the California Story Fund are now available on the Council's website. An online application will be posted Jan 2, 2008. The Council is interested in projects that bring to light compelling stories from California's diverse communities and provide opportunities for collective reflection and public discussion. The winners will be announced at the end of April 2008.

## TWO JOIN COUNCIL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The Council is pleased to welcome Kenya Davis-Hayes and Leonard Olds to the Board of Directors.

Davis-Hayes is an assistant professor of U.S. history at California Baptist University. In addition to her academic duties, she actively participates in local, state and international projects and programs that help build community. She has done volunteer grant writing for the Santa Ana Grain Project, an organization that provides locally grown produce to working-class communities in Orange County through farmers markets, served as a member of the Corona Kiwanis Club, and co-created a social justice-based curriculum that is taught each summer at the National University of Rwanda. Davis-Hayes holds a doctorate from Purdue University.

Olds has been active in California and national Republican politics for more than 30 years. He is the founder of the Riverside County Log Cabin group, was an original member of the Orange County Log Cabin chapter and has served in various positions, including president and vice president, with the Log Cabin California state chapter. He currently serves as chairman of the Liberty Education Forum Board of Directors, a bipartisan think-tank in Washington, D.C., that works closely with the national Log Cabin Republican organization.

Olds was raised in Los Angeles and holds degrees from UCLA and the University of Southern California. Before retiring, he taught elementary school in the Los Angeles School District for 30 years.



John Lightfoot

## JOHN LIGHTFOOT NEW PROGRAMS MANAGER

John Lightfoot joined the Council in August as programs manager. He is responsible for managing the California Documentary Project grant line.

Lightfoot has been producing, teaching and studying documentary film for the past 15 years. Most recently, he taught film and video production at UC Berkeley's Art Studio and, before that, spent six years at Twin Cities Public Television in Saint Paul, Minn., where he produced long- and short-form documentaries for PBS.

Lightfoot's latest film, "Obituary: A Caustic Tale," is an experimental biography of Hiram Maxim, the inventor of the machine gun. The film has received awards from the Princess Grace Foundation-USA and the Bay Area Video Coalition, and won San Francisco State's John Gutmann Award for experimental work.

Lightfoot holds a bachelor of arts degree in history from New York University, a master's degree in American civilization from Brown University, and an MFA in cinema from San Francisco State University.

Lightfoot can be reached at [jlightfoot@calhum.org](mailto:jlightfoot@calhum.org).

## DECEMBER BOARD MEETING

The next quarterly meeting of the California Council for the Humanities will take place on Thurs. Dec. 13, at the Huntington Library, Art Collections and Botanical Gardens in San Marino. The meeting is open to the public. For details, contact the San Francisco Office at 415/391-1474, or send an e-mail to Patricia Croteau at [pcroteau@calhum.org](mailto:pcroteau@calhum.org).



During an evening of fun at the two-day YDF kickoff event in San Francisco, Zyania Lizarraga, of the Lodi Project, dances to the music of JCT, a popular Richmond, Calif. reggaeton group led by Council staffer Carlos Torres. Photo/Valeria Torres.

Members of the Concord group never learned about LGBT history in high school, so they hope to make a film about it. Here Ismael Castillo, Kim Chatham, Isabel Malonzo, and Jillian Ross present a tableau of their film idea during a YDF kickoff event workshop. Photo/Carlos Torres.

Long Beach teens, whose parents fled Cambodia because of war, plan to make a film about the impact of war on their lives. Here project leader Sophya Chum (left) talks to Dianna Brang, Samantha Chin and Sovondoughchang So during a workshop exercise. Photo/Carlos Torres.

Spoken-word artist Paul Flores and independent filmmaker Jen Marlowe led many of the workshops at the YDF kickoff event. Photo/Carlos Torres.

The two day kick-off event, organized by CCH Programs Manager and filmmaker Raeshma Razvi, was designed as a way for the teens and adults to get to know each other, learn about each other's projects and make friends. "We also wanted to inspire the young people about filmmaking and give them some hands-on skills," Razvi said. The group stayed at the Parc 55 Hotel in downtown San Francisco and attended workshops at the downtown campus of San Francisco State University.

The teens heard from experienced filmmakers, video production specialists and CCH staff. Council Executive Director Jim Quay kicked off

the two days by talking to the teens about the importance and value of their stories. "We will be listening intently to what your films have to say," he said.

Spoken-word artist Paul Flores and independent filmmaker Jen Marlowe led many of the sessions, engaging the youths in a variety of exercises to help them define their film ideas, realize the importance of place in their films and learn how to conduct successful interviews, among other things.

Independent filmmakers Dawn Valadez and Jed Riffe, recipients of CCH mediagrants, showed the teens clips from their films and talked about their approaches to filmmaking.

Jennifer Gilomen and Dillon Thomas, of the San Francisco media arts center Bay Area Video Coalition, led workshops on lighting, sound and the use of camera equipment. Associate Executive Director Ralph Lewin led a round-table discussion for the project directors about the work of the Council.

Three members of Youth Speaks, one of the country's premier youth programs in spoken word, entertained the group on their first night at a venue in San Francisco's Mission District. The evening was topped off with a performance by the Richmond, Calif., reggaeton group JCT, led by Council staffer Carlos Torres.

The two days ended with a movie-related bus tour of San Francisco, giving the teens and adults a chance to see the exact house where the TV series "Full House" was filmed, the building where Christian Slater interviewed Brad Pitt in "Interview With the Vampire" and the locations for a host of other films.

Some of the teens had never been to San Francisco before or ridden in an airplane or stayed at a fancy hotel. But they seemed to take all that in stride. Other things about their two days in San Francisco left more of an impression.

Seventeen-year-old Kim Chatham, from the Concord project, was surprised at the wide variety of film

## YDF Fresno Project (continued from page 1)

Over the next year, the teens will research, write and create their documentary with the help of educational anthropologist Denise Blum of California State University, Fresno, and filmmaker MaryJane Skjellerup and Project Director Brandon Wright, of the Center for Multicultural Cooperation, a Fresno nonprofit committed to mobilizing Central Valley youth to use technology and media to serve their communities.

The 10 teens, of Latino, Hmong, African American and Anglo heritage, were drawn from the Fresno center's Digitally Abled Producers Project, a leadership program for Fresno's young people between the ages of 12 and 19.

"A big part of what the teens will be looking at is the history of the connections between and among the various groups who have come to Fresno over the years," said Blum. "We know a lot about individual groups — Latinos, African Americans, Anglos, Japanese Americans, Filipino Americans, Hmong Americans and others — but most people don't live their lives just with one group. There's a lot of intersecting

and overlapping that's important to Fresno's history, and for the most part those stories haven't been told before. Many of the stories are about how individuals of different backgrounds came together to solve problems. We will also be asking the kids to think about how they're connected to the history they're uncovering."

The 10 teens meet with Blum and Skjellerup on Saturdays to learn about Fresno's history and the connections Blum talks about — and to acquire storytelling and digital filmmaking skills.

They have watched and discussed "The Grapes of Wrath," the movie based on Steinbeck's novel about the Joad family's journey from Oklahoma to California during the Great Depression, and they attended an all-day diversity awareness workshop. Also on the agenda are readings from such local authors as David Mas Masumoto, who writes about his life as a peach farmer in Del Rey, Calif.; William Saroyan, the son of Armenian immigrants who grew up in Fresno and set many of his stories, plays and essays there; and Mark Arax, an award-winning



Members of the Fresno team on a shoot: From left: Filmmaker MaryJane Skjellerup and teens Nora Walker, Jennifer Gaxiola and Maricela Hernandez.

Fresno-based Los Angeles Times reporter who has written extensively about the culture and life of the people in the Central Valley.

The teens have also begun to conduct preliminary interviews with potential storytellers. "These initial interviews give the group practice asking questions and using cameras and mikes in a real situation," Skjellerup said.

After each interview, Skjellerup and Blum use the footage as a teaching tool. "We view the interviews together and ask the teens questions like, Would this

person be a good storyteller? What is it about this story that makes an impact? Does the location of the interview add to the story? Is the lighting adequate? What would make this story stronger? And so forth." "It's a way for the teens to learn the elements of a good story and to evaluate the film's technical aspects," Skjellerup said.

So far the teens have interviewed a woman in Lindsay, Calif., about a Japanese city cultural exchange program for Fresno-area youth; a family who owns a 40-acre ranch outside Sanger, Calif., about their experience living alongside



Krista Kim and Ruben Palomares, of the San Francisco project, show their creative sides during a workshop exercise at the YDF kickoff event. Photo/Carlos Torres.



Jasmine Tatum, of the Los Angeles Project, plans on making filmmaking her career. Photo/Carlos Torres.



Justina Harrison (left), Marissa Allard and Donald O'Reilly hope to make a film about the history of Siskiyou County. Photo/Carlos Torres.



Members of the Oakland group look like professional news reporters at a YDF workshop. From left: Patrick Phanh, Yen Nguyen (with her back to the camera) and Mercedes Hill (holding the microphone.) Photo/Carlos Torres.

topics the groups were tackling. "It made me realize how many problems there are that affect people everywhere," she said. Chatham and the other Concord teens plan to make a film about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender history. "We want to expand people's knowledge and help people feel more comfortable with the topic," Chatham said.

"The people were from all over," said 14-year-old Yen Nguyen of Oakland. "Before I met the kids from Mount Shasta, I thought Shasta was a soda, not a mountain, and I thought Lodi was some kind of a temple." Nguyen and the other Oakland participants plan to make

a film about Cambodian American teens and their connection to a housing complex that is the center of the Oakland Cambodian American community.

"It was surprising to me what different kids have been through," said 17-year old Mount Shasta High School senior Marissa Allard, of the Siskiyou County project, who struck up a friendship with 18-year-old Jasmine Tatum, who lives in a shelter run by Covenant House, an agency serving homeless youth that is sponsoring the Los Angeles project. The two now plan to exchange "lives" for a few days and film the experience. That's in addition to working on their own

projects, Allard's about the history of Siskiyou County and Tatum's about living on the streets in Los Angeles.

What struck event organizer Razvi was how engaged the teens were in all the activities. "At the spoken word event on the first night, some of the young people volunteered to get up and speak their stories, and the audience was loudly encouraging, and then everyone danced, and not just with the people from their projects. It was great to see all this happen within the first 24 hours. And I think some kids really bonded with each other, and that's something that's very gratifying."

The teens are now back home, getting down to the nitty-gritty work of planning, organizing and writing their films. "It was a great trip for the kids," said Mark Oliver, director of the Siskiyou County project. "They were really excited to be part of a statewide project, and when they got back, they immediately started brainstorming about how to proceed, and their ideas began to solidify. Things really kicked into high gear."

The two-day event was co-sponsored by the Institute for Next Generation Internet at San Francisco State University.



Jennifer Gaxiola, of the Fresno project, seen here with Project Director Brandon Wright, hopes that the Fresno YDF film — about the area's agricultural history — will make the world see Fresno differently. Photo/Carlos Torres.

ranching neighbors of four different cultural backgrounds; two United Farm Worker organizers about the diversity of people in UFW union leadership and rank and file; and a longtime resident of West Fresno about her experience raising a family on a rural half-acre plot of land.

Once the teens decide on storytellers, they will spend up to four weeks with each individual, getting to know the person and collecting photographs and other materials to help illustrate the story. "The actual interviews will take place after the teens have developed a relationship with their subjects and mapped out

the questions they want to cover," Skjellerup said. "They may conduct the interview outside as the subject points out where an orchard used to be or where Japanese families used to live before being taken away to internment camps during World War II."

Jennifer Gaxiola, a 15-year-old sophomore at Roosevelt High School and one of the participants in the project, hopes that the documentary will make viewers realize that Fresno is made up not just of people of Mexican heritage. "A lot of different cultures have come together and cooperated with



Zyanya Lizarraga, of the Lodi project, and Nora Walker, of the Fresno project, learn about the importance of lighting at a YDF kickoff event workshop. Photo/Carlos Torres.

each other to create Fresno, and that's what we hope to show in the film," she said. Gaxiola also hopes the film will encourage Fresnoans of all backgrounds to find common ground with each other today. "We can all come together and cooperate just like people did in the past and not leave anyone behind," she said.

The Fresno teens' documentary, titled "Common Ground: Sowing the Seeds of Understanding in the San Joaquin Valley," will be screened at several venues in May 2008, including California State University, Fresno, and at Fresno's

historic Tower Theater.

The Fresno project is part of the California Council for the Humanities Youth Digital Filmmakers project, a statewide program of the Council's new California Stories How I See It campaign in eight communities in California. Other participating groups are in Concord, Lodi, Long Beach, Oakland, Los Angeles and San Francisco and in Siskiyou County.

For more information about the Fresno project visit the Council's website at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).



Teens from Oakland's Youth Digital Filmmakers project pause near their hotel in San Francisco during the two-day YDF kickoff event. From left: Yen Nguyen, Mercedes Hill, Maria San, Jonathan Hall and Patrick Phanh. Photo/CB Smith-Dahl.

which are now under way, are located in Concord, Fresno, Lodi, Long Beach, Los Angeles, Oakland and San Francisco as well as Siskiyou County. The Council awarded each of the eight projects \$30,000 in funding in June.

The teens will create films on a variety of topics under the broad theme of connections and disconnections. "This could be anything from connections to family, to community, to the outside world, or disconnections from these things," said CCH Programs Manager Raeshma Razvi, an experienced filmmaker. "The theme provides a unifying element among all the projects."

Throughout the year, the teens will attend regular workshop sessions to learn interviewing, storytelling and filmmaking skills. A team of filmmakers, humanities scholars and project directors will guide each project. "The teens get to work with experienced filmmakers and project organizers, but what makes these projects unique is the involvement of the humanities scholars," Razvi said. "The scholar will engage the teens in thinking critically about their ideas and provide them with the historical or other context for their stories. Our hope is that this knowledge will help them create films with a wider meaning that will resonate more profoundly with viewers."

When completed in summer 2008, the films will be screened locally in the teens' communities, broadcast on cable television channels and available for viewing on the Council's website.

To make communication easier within and among the groups, the teens use a collaborative website called a wiki, where they can upload photos and videos, share information and discuss their projects. The website is open only to individuals connected to the projects and CCH staff.

Youth Digital Filmmakers is being conducted in partnership with the Digital Storytelling Institute of the Community Technology Foundation of California. The Stuart Foundation, the James Irvine Foundation and the National Endowment for the Humanities provided significant support for the program.

The following are the eight Youth Digital Filmmakers projects:

#### LONG BEACH

##### **My Reality and My Vision: Stories From Long Beach**

Sponsored by Khmer Girls in Action; Suely Ngouy, project director; Mar Elepaño, filmmaker; and Karen Quintiliani, humanities scholar (California State University, Long Beach).

Cambodian teens will examine their identity as Americans, the impact of war on their lives, and why the designation of a part of Long Beach as Cambodia Town may not have been such a great idea.

#### LOS ANGELES

##### **My Spaces: Homeless Youth Explore the Geography of Disconnection**

Sponsored by Covenant House California; Jan Pfeiffer, project director and workshop leader; Vanessa Schwartz, humanities scholar (University of Southern California).

Formerly homeless youth will create a documentary about what it's like to live on the streets and the challenges they face in creating a better life.

#### OAKLAND

##### **I Ain't Leaving**

Sponsored by the East Bay Asian Youth Center; Peter Kim, project director; CB Smith-Dahl, filmmaker; Elaine Kim, humanities scholar (University of California, Berkeley).

Cambodian American teens will create a film about their struggle to maintain ties to the place where they grew up, which is the center of the Cambodian American community.

#### SAN FRANCISCO

##### **Untitled**

Sponsored by Conscious Youth Media Crew; Debra Koffler, project director; Sam Styles, filmmaker; Nancy Mirabal, humanities scholar (San Francisco State University).

Inner-city San Francisco teens will write, direct and produce a narrative film that follows two brothers and their friends as they try to find purpose in their lives in spite of drugs, gangs and violence.

#### CONCORD

##### **Don't Erase My History**

Sponsored by Ally Action Inc.; Andrea Fazel, project director; Thomas Michael Coberg, filmmaker; Martin Meeker, humanities scholar (Regional Oral History Office, University of California, Berkeley).

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender teens will create a film about LGBT history and screen it in local schools for other LGBT teens.

#### FRESNO

##### **Common Ground: Sowing the Seeds of Understanding in the San Joaquin Valley**

Sponsored by the Center for Multicultural Cooperation; Brandon Wright, project director; MaryJane Skjellerup, filmmaker; Denise Blum, humanities scholar (California State University, Fresno).

Fresno teens will make a film about the agricultural history of the Fresno region with particular emphasis on the connections among the various ethnic groups that farmed, and continue to farm, the land.

#### SISKIYOU COUNTY

##### **Voices Between the Mountains: Coming of Age in the Siskiyous**

Sponsored by the Siskiyou Arts Council, Mount Shasta; Mark Oliver, project director and filmmaker; Charlie Unkefer, humanities scholar (College of the Siskiyous).

Teens from the towns of Mount Shasta and Happy Camp and the Karuk Nation will create a film about the process of learning the history of Siskiyou County.

#### LODI

##### **Finding Our Own Way: Teens in Lodi**

Sponsored by Lodi High School; Jerry Pike, project director; David Meyers, filmmaker and workshop leader; Samuel Regalado, humanities scholar (California State University, Stanislaus).

Juniors and seniors at Lodi High School will make a series of documentaries about the growing concern in Lodi about the lack of connection of Lodi teens to their community and school and how some teens are trying to solve the problem.



A young Mixtec farmworker in a shelter he built in a camp on a hillside outside Delmar in San Diego County.



The annual festival of Oaxacan indigenous culture, the Guelaguetza, is a showcase for Oaxacan dancers now living in the United States. Here members of the community of San Miguel Cuevas and dancers from Grupo Folklorico Se'e Savi perform the Danza de Los Diablos during a Guelaguetza in Fresno.



Hermilo Lopez, a Mixtec immigrant from San Juan Mixtepec, Oaxaca, and his youngest son, Juanito. The Lopez family works picking bell peppers, raisins and other crops around Fresno.

## DOCUMENTING THE LIVES OF INDIGENOUS MEXICAN FARMWORKERS

### Photographs become a catalyst for change

They harvest our crops and clear our land, but they can't afford to rent our houses. Instead they live in the fields, in makeshift tents, under tarps or in their cars, all but invisible to outsiders. "It's a reality check for anyone interested in immigration reform," said photographer and writer David Bacon about "Living Under the Trees," his California Documentary Project photography exhibit on the lives of indigenous Mexican farmworkers.

The subjects of the photographs are indigenous people from the Mexican state of Oaxaca with centuries-old cultures: Mixtecs, Purepechas, Triques, Zapotecos and Chatinos. They live in communities in San Diego, Coachella, Arvin, Oxnard, Santa Paula, Santa Maria, Fresno, Salinas, Santa Rosa, Fairfield and Corning.

The exhibit, which consists of 36 large color photographs and six panels of oral histories, depicts the harsh living and working conditions of the migrants' existence but also highlights the vibrant culture they draw from — the music, the dances, the food and the art. "They are making California a richer place," Bacon said.

So far, the exhibit has been presented at venues in Los Angeles, Fresno and Merced. Its next stop is San Francisco, where it opens Dec. 8, then San Diego, in March 2008. "We'd also like to take it to smaller towns and communities if we can figure out a way to get the resources to do so," Bacon said.

Bacon got the idea for the exhibit while photographing and collecting stories from migrant communities throughout the United States. The book based on that work, "Communities Without Borders — Images and Voices From the World of Migration," was published in October 2006.

Bacon views his work as a vehicle for social change. "Part of its purpose is to use the photographs and oral histories as a way to bring indigenous people together to talk about their concerns," he said.

In that regard, while the exhibit was in Los Angeles this past spring, the Binational Front of Indigenous Organizations, a community-based

*Background photo: Gloria Merino (r), a Triqui curandera, or traditional doctor, has organized a Triqui women's group with her niece, Catalina Ramirez Merino (l), and a third Triqui woman in a traditional huipil.*

coalition of indigenous groups and one of Bacon's project partners, held three community meetings for Los Angeles-area Zapotecas, with the exhibit as a focal point. "They used it as a way of saying, Look what's happening to fellow community members in rural areas of California. We need to do something to help them."

And while the exhibit was at Arte Americas, a center for Latino art in Fresno, staff members of California Rural Legal Assistance, the project sponsor, conducted a training session for farmworkers on workplace and community rights in the center's gallery. That event received extensive media attention, including coverage by Al Jazeera, the Arabic news and current affairs channel.

"The project is a dialogue," Bacon said. "We take photographs, record interviews, create an exhibit. And then the people in the photographs use them for their own purposes. It's a participatory process."

Bacon said that as a photographer, he is happy about the images and the quality of the work. "Part of what you can do with the photography is to move people emotionally, and I think that's what these photographs do. But you also want the photographs to make people think critically about what they are seeing and to take action. I think the photographs succeed on that count, too."

Despite the challenges that indigenous people face — including hostile communities, militia groups and stepped up raids by immigration officials — Bacon is optimistic about the future. "There's a growing awareness in California about the presence and culture of indigenous people, and many people want to understand it better. And Indigenous people have strong ties to their communities. They are well organized, and they look out for each other. We could learn a lot from them."

**"Living Under the Trees" will be presented at Galeria de la Raza, 2857 24th St. in San Francisco's Mission District from Dec. 8 to Feb. 10, 2008. For information, visit [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org) or [www.galeriadelaraza.org](http://www.galeriadelaraza.org). To learn more about David Bacon and his work, visit Bacon's website at [dbaaron.igc.org](http://dbaaron.igc.org).**



The Diaz family. From left, Guillermmina Ortiz Diaz, Graciela, Eliadora, their mother Bernardina Diaz Martinez and little sister Ana Lilia.

### BERNARDINA DIAZ MARTINEZ, A MIXTEC IMMIGRANT FROM OAXACA

*The following excerpt from David Bacon's oral history interview with Bernardino Diaz Martinez is part of the "Living Under the Trees" exhibit. Martinez lives with her family in one room of a house in Oxnard where other migrant families live.*

"I was born in Oaxaca, in San Martin Peras. Eighteen years ago I got married, but my husband left us when my children were very young. So I left San Martin to work, and took all my daughters with me. In Culiacan we worked in the tomato fields and cut pines.

"My children were small and I had to work very hard to feed them. We all lived in a single room. The pay was only seventy pesos per week, just enough to buy food. We didn't have enough money for shoes. We would come every four months to work the tomato crop. When the work was over, we returned home, and when we ran out of money we went to work again....They said it paid better here in the U.S., so I borrowed money and we left on a bus. "In Sonora we crossed on foot with a relative who knew the way. We

walked five nights and three days. We ran out of water and food. We ate plants like spinach we found in the desert. It was September, and very hot.

"Here in Oxnard someone traveling with us knew a place to stay. Then one of my daughter's teachers helped us find this room for rent. We pay \$500, and an extra \$50 to use the gas in the kitchen.

"Thirteen people live in the house, all from different places. Now two of the girls work and the others go to school. My daughters say my biggest accomplishment is bringing them here. I see that they can better themselves, but our checks come out to \$200 per week and that's not enough....Sometimes we can't pay the rent.

"Each year we go to Salinas for four months but it costs \$60 for our ride — \$360 for all of us. Last year we found a room, but we were evicted because they wanted to charge us more rent and we couldn't afford it. We sometimes take a month to find a job, because we don't own a car and have to walk from place to place. Any money we save here we use up there to eat while we're looking. Then if we don't work fast enough, they fire us.

"Still, we live better here because we have food to eat. In Mexico that's not always the case. I'm afraid the government might think I'm too poor and deport me or perhaps take my children away because they think I can't care for them. I wish we could get legal residence so that we could live in peace."

# Who We Are

The mission of the California Council for the Humanities is to foster understanding between people and encourage their engagement in community life through the public use of the humanities.

The Council is an independent, not-for-profit state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities supported through a public-private partnership that includes funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities, private foundations and corporations. The Council also receives essential support from individuals.

To learn more about the Council and how you can participate in its programs, please visit us online at [www.californiastories.org](http://www.californiastories.org).

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## INSIDE

Photographs that affect  
hearts and minds

**INSIDE** Teens to make films about what matters in their lives

# HUMANITIES

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